



# UNDERSTANDING THE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION WORKFORCE IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

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## SUMMARY

This research report is part of a broader project investigating AE educators' experiences of Professional Learning and Development (PLD)—the aim of which is to explore ways in which the AE workforce may be strengthened. The first part of this study was completed in 2020 and focused on understanding the ways in which professionalism has developed in two related sectors: Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Youth Work.<sup>1</sup> The first part of the study also included a literature review of PLD in AE, drawing on research knowledge in the emerging field. It was found that very little was known about the demographics and PLD experiences of AE educators.

This research is part two of the broader study. The aim of this research project was to investigate the PLD needs and experiences of educators working in AE. This research will inform the sector and key stakeholders, by acting as a tool to facilitate sector-wide conversations and strategic planning toward the overall strengthening of the AE workforce.

An anonymous online survey and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. All AE educators throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand were invited to participate including teachers, tutors, support workers, programme managers, AE regional coordinators and Pedagogical Leaders. The aim of the survey was to gather a range of perspectives from AE educators on their experiences of PLD. The interviews provided the opportunity to delve deeper into the survey data, by unpacking responses and trends found from the survey.

Themes that emerged from an analysis of the data included:

Professional identity of AE educators, and the place of AE within education and youth development sectors.

AE educators' preferences for both what and how they would like to learn and access PLD including an exploration of a specialised qualification

Systemic barriers and structural issues including the exclusionary nature of education (and the suggestion of better integration with mainstream education), barriers to PLD provision, and inconsistencies within AE provision that impact on strengthening the workforce.

Examples of such considerations may include but are not limited to the development of requirements and monitoring of employment conditions, a strengthening of alliance to Learning Support networks and service provision, and a review and/or creation of consistencies of Pedagogical Leadership support across the sector.

The analysis included an examination of what part one of this study (*Lesson from Related Sectors*) may offer to the strengthening of the AE workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce, J. (2020). *Alternative Education workforce development in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Lessons from related sectors*. Report commissioned by the Wayne Francis Charitable Trust and Vodafone Aotearoa Foundation. Retrieved from <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/10131>.

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

With culturally responsive relationships at the centre, Alternative Education (AE) may be defined as a high support and high challenge environment, led by skilled educators enabling learning opportunities for rangatahi during a crucial time of development and learning (Bruce, 2020<sup>2</sup>).

There are many challenges for educators in AE, and unique and specialised skills are required to work effectively. AE in NZ has long been considered a marginalised sector due to a lack of equitable resourcing, the high and complex needs of young people, and a varied workforce with minimal specialised training available. There is little known about the profession itself or the professional learning and development experiences, needs and learning preferences for educators working.

Therefore, the aim of this research was to better understand the current workforce and to investigate the PLD needs and experiences of educators working in AE with the view to informing a strategy to strengthen the AE workforce. For the purpose of this research, PLD is defined as any formal or structured learning that supports the professional development of educators working in AE settings. PLD is inclusive of ongoing in-service development and qualification pathways. There are two parts to this research: (1) a survey of AE educators working in the sector; and (2) in-depth interviews with AE educators from a range of experiences and roles.

This research will inform the sector and key stakeholders, by acting as a tool to facilitate sector-wide conversations and strategic planning toward the overall strengthening of the AE workforce. In the previous related study<sup>1</sup>, examining growth in related sectors (ECE and youth work), found that growth in professionalism stems from collective leadership, and the development and adoption of key guiding documents within sectors. The documents provide a common direction and enable a common language which in turn generates a sense of connection and belonging, thus contributing to a growth in professional identity. Furthermore, it was found that a sector wide strategy provides opportunities for growth as the document gives clarity of vision and focus, and increases collective ownership. Design requires a range of steps including but not limited to researching the current workforce demographics and roles; mapping current workforce needs; critiquing the value of existing PLD programmes; identifying gaps; and designing a way forward. A strategy can include key vision, values, goals, priorities and actions that take account of the diverse needs of the workforce, entry points and learning pathways, key content, providers, etc.

Understanding the AE workforce experiences of PLD was considered important as this may form a foundation for strategic planning toward strengthening the sector. This research project sought to provide this needed evidence.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data was collected through survey and interviews with AE educators, including programme managers, AE regional coordinators and Pedagogical Leaders. The aim of the survey was to gather a range of perspectives from AE educators on their experiences of PLD. The interviews provided the opportunity to delve deeper into the survey data, by unpacking responses and trends found from the survey. Details of the data collection and analysis are provided in the following sections.

### The survey

An online survey was designed by the Alternative Education National Body in consultation with the Ministry of Education, Nov 2020. The survey was distributed to AE providers via AE Regional Representatives. Participants could choose to complete the survey anonymously. Data was analysed using quantitative statistics and qualitative thematic analysis.

The overall aim of the survey was to understand the PLD experiences and needs of AE educators. The survey sought information on the following:

- The demographics of participants
- PLD experiences
- PLD topics participants would like to engage in
- Preferred methods for their own learning
- Barriers to accessing PLD
- Engagement with Pedagogical Leaders
- MOE Learning Support funding access

A small number of questions were specifically for those in management roles. These related to Ministry of Education Learning Support funding access.

53 participants completed the survey; an estimated 20% of the AE workforce<sup>3</sup>. While this is a reasonable response rate, caution must be taken when interpreting results. As more than 70% of those who completed the survey have been working in the sector for more than 4 years, it is probable that more recently employed AE educators were less likely to complete the survey; therefore, potentially skewing the data.

## RESULTS

The results are presented here question by question using graphics and supported by text, and includes preliminary analysis and a summary. Further discussion as this data relates to the interview findings is included in the Discussion and Recommendations section of this report.

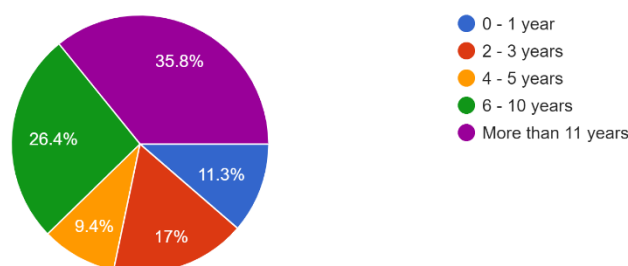
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<sup>3</sup> This is an estimated figure only. The number of educators employed in AE throughout NZ is not known.

## Demographics

68% of people who completed the survey were women and 32% men; 60% identified as NZ European, 25% as Māori and 10% Pacific Island. The remaining participants identified as minority ethnicities.

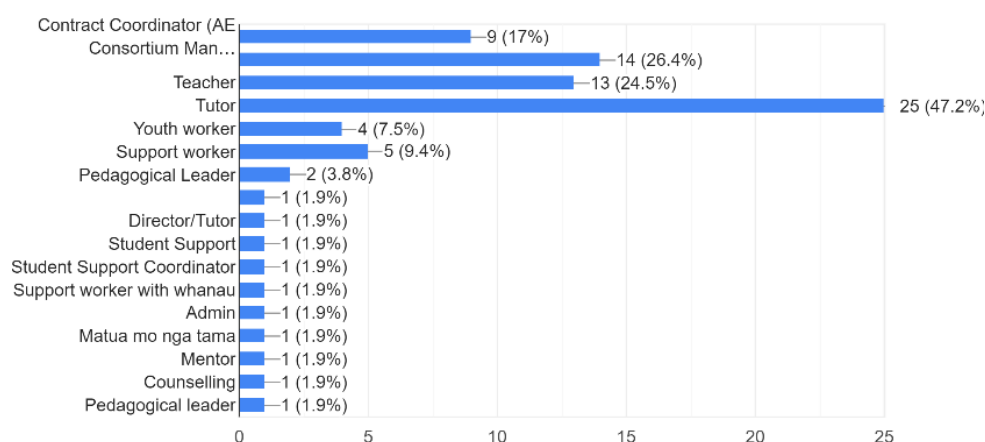
How many years have you been working in AE?  
53 responses



As can be seen in the chart above, the majority of participants have been working in the sector for 4 or more years, including 36% who have been working in the sector for more than 11 years. It is possible that more recently employed AE educators were less likely to complete the survey and this may have impacted the results.

Regarding role names, participants were able to select more than one role to reflect their work in AE. This is because there are many variations in terms of role responsibilities, and role names given to educators employed also varies. Furthermore, there are no statutory required set roles. The chart below provides a snapshot of the diversity of roles, and the way that participants view themselves within the sector.

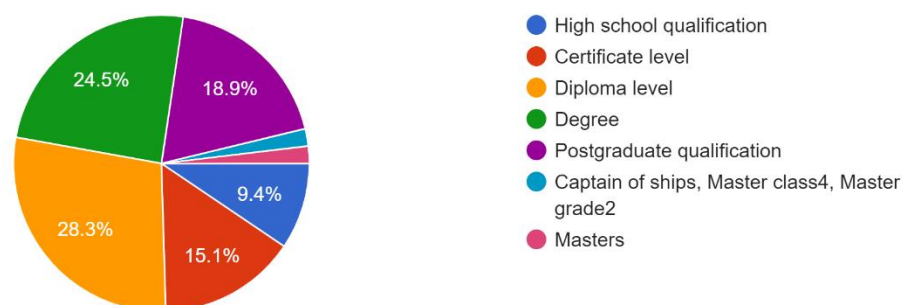
What is your role in AE? You can select more than one answer.  
53 responses



Given that the majority of those who completed the survey were experienced educators, it is perhaps not surprising that many have qualifications, including 54% with degree and postgraduate qualifications.

Please select your highest qualification .

53 responses



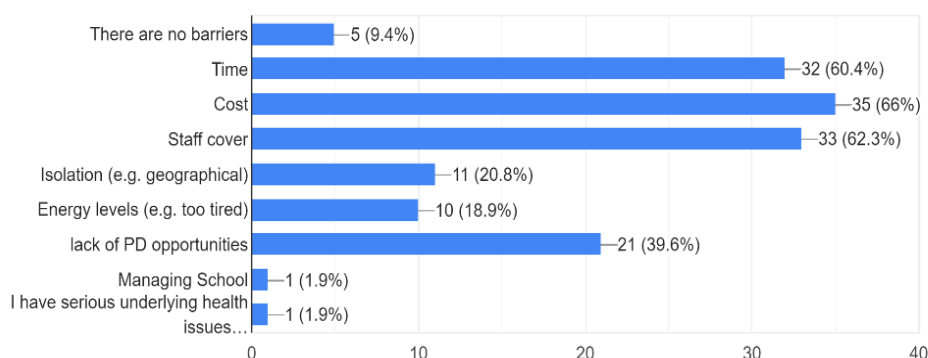
The majority of participants (51%) have education and teaching related qualifications. 13% have youth work or youth development related qualifications, and a further 13% have social services related qualifications. For a further 9%, the highest qualification is school based. The remainder of participants have a diverse range of disciplinary qualifications.

### ***PLD experiences***

Regarding barriers to accessing PLD, 26% of participants indicated that they did not take part in PLD during 2020.

What barriers exist for you to access PLD?

53 responses



There were a variety of reasons given as to why participants reported not participating in PLD. The main barriers reported were cost, a lack of educators' cover, and time. As one participant explained "Relief cover is the largest barrier" and requested that relevant PLD is not timetabled when AE classes are happening. People also indicated either a lack of PLD



opportunities, or a lack of relevant PLD. Additionally, energy levels were reported by a number of participants as a barrier to learning. Geographical isolation also made it difficult for many to take part; some commenting on this as “the tyranny of distance”. Another participant requested the “need [for] more consultation and invitation to PLD by managing schools”.

For those who did take part in PLD, there were a range of providers and topics experienced. Topics could be grouped into the following categories, listed here with corresponding percentages of participants engaged:

Topic	Percentage of participants
PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning)	18
Digital technologies	15
RAP, Response Ability Pathways	10
General regional hui	10
Neuro diverse learners	8
Trauma informed practice	8

Other topics indicated in the survey were diverse and included first aid, transition, social education, child protection, and wellbeing. Other than digital technology, only two participants reported PLD in curriculum related topics (numeracy and literacy, and NCEA assessment). One person had taken part in leadership training, and another in learning Te Reo.

From a suggested range of 25 possible topics, participants indicated what they would like to receive PLD training in. The top 10 most requested topics were in the following order:

Topic	Percentage
Māori youth development	64
Hauora/wellbeing	64
Trauma informed practice	62
Transitioning young people	57
Culturally responsive pedagogies	55
Behaviour management	53
Neuro diverse learners	51
Pacific youth development	51
Educators’ wellbeing	49
Curriculum assessment	47

Participants indicated they were least interested in PLD on the following topics: administration and organisational skills, Digital technology skills, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), ILPs/IEPs, Assessment, and the Te Tiriti o Waitangi. While UDL was one of the least preferred topics, many participants indicated they would like to learn more about teaching neuro diverse learners, so it is possible they may not be aware of what UDL has to offer. When asked, what PLD would help you in your work right now, 23% requested “further training with neuro-diversity and educational approaches”, “different types of teaching

angles that cater to non-mainstream students”, and “adapting learning with students who have high needs”.

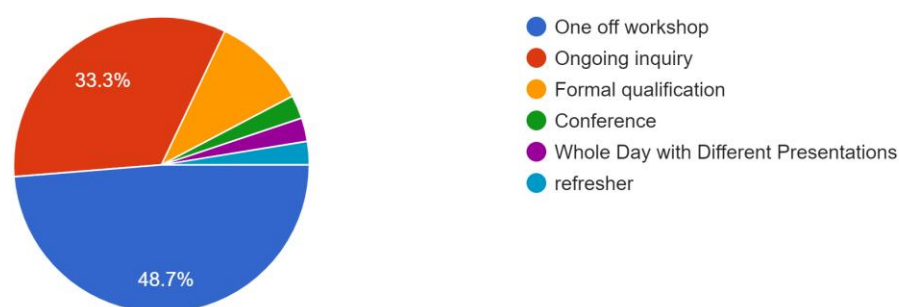
Additional topics requested by participants included further learning on Wellbeing and Resilience related topics such as suicide, substance use; project-based learning, reading recovery/literacy, and health and safety.

PLD was mainly delivered by outside providers (58%). Other PLD was provided in house (11%), by MOE (11%), by Pedagogical Leaders (11%), with regional AE groups (11%), and by a local school (3%).

As can be seen from the chart below, PLD was mostly one-off workshops (49%), followed by ongoing inquiry into practice (33%). A further 10% are engaged in unspecified formal qualification study.

The PLD is best described as:

39 responses



Pedagogical Leaders<sup>4</sup> are an important part of many AE educators PLD journeys. In order to learn more about the role of Pedagogical Leaders in providing PLD, AE educators were asked two related questions: (1) *In what ways does the Pedagogical Leader support your programme?* and (2) *What other Pedagogical Leader support would be useful?*

While 8% of participants indicated that support was “minimal”, the majority of participants responded very positively to the support that their Pedagogical Leaders give to their

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<sup>4</sup> Pedagogical Leaders provide support to educators working in AE programmes. The objectives of are to ensure that the provision of AE has:

- tutors with cultural competence in working with diverse students
- programmes that address the identity, language and cultural needs of Māori students
- quality curriculum planning and assessment
- strategies to build engaging learning activities
- suitable self-review processes.

programmes. The most common areas of support were regular meetings, educational support and curriculum resource planning and provision. A wide range of responses can be summarised into the following key areas of support:

- Through observations and feedback
- Organising and/or delivering PLD
- Helping with Individual Learning Plans
- Behaviour management ideas and planning
- Regular meetings and general education support and advice
- Curriculum resource planning and provision
- Giving one on one lessons
- Liaising with AE Consortium Manager/Coordinator and Schools
- Pedagogical delivery support

Regarding the second question, “*What other Pedagogical Leader support would be useful?*”, a number of participants indicated there was no other support needed and 19% indicated they were not sure. Those who did respond with ideas, indicated that the following would be useful:

- Sourcing and delivering more PLD
- Help with strategic planning
- Support with assessment for learning, including NCEA
- Curriculum materials/learning resources
- More time for support, including regular meetings
- Behaviour management support
- Networking and communicating key ideas.

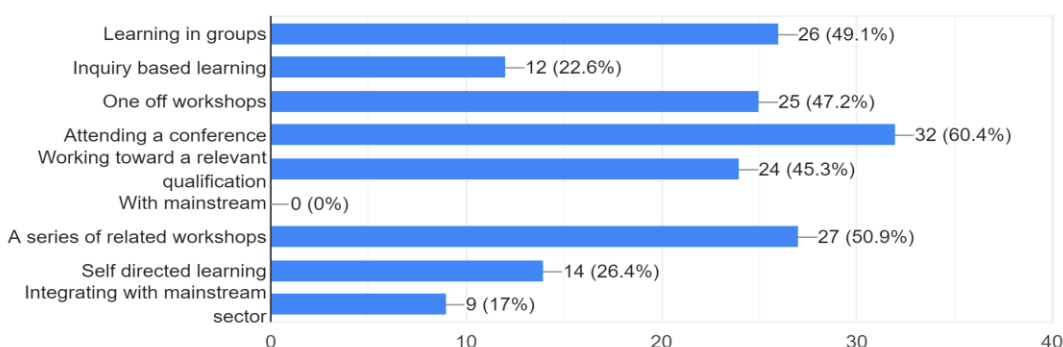
Regarding this last point, *networking and communicating key ideas*, participants indicated that they would like the Pedagogical Leaders to keep educators up to date with MOE initiatives, PLD opportunities, key ideas from other Pedagogical Leaders, AE programmes and schools, and the AENB.

### ***PLD learning preferences***

Understanding how AE educators prefer to engage in PLD, and their preferred style of learning is an important factor in promoting meaningful engagement to strengthen the workforce. Two questions provided some insight into this. Firstly, how do AE educators learn best? And relatedly, what PLD experiences would AE like to take part in? The responses are provided in the charts below.

### How do you learn best?

53 responses



Participants primarily learn best through conference attendance, series of related workshops and learning in groups. The least selected responses were self directed learning and learning with the mainstream sector.

When given the following choices of PLD experiences they would like to take part in, participants indicated their preferences as follows:

PLD experience	Percentage of participants (could choose more than one answer)
Micro-credentials	51
Specialised qualification	49
Communities of practice	49
Online hub for learning and connection	26

There appears to be a keen interest in working toward a relevant qualification as part of a community of practice.

### **MOE Learning Support funding access**

60% of participants were AE programme managers and a series of questions were asked of their experiences of engaging with Learning Support Coordinators, external curriculum providers, and MOE funding support access.

Learning Support Coordinators (LSC) have been engaged in a small number of AE programmes, although the majority of participants (80%) indicated that they had not received any support from LSCs.

External curriculum material is accessed by the majority of providers and *Te Aho O Te Kura Pounamu* (Correspondence School) is most commonly used by 62% of participants. *Supported*

*Learning Resources* (38%) and the *Open Polytechnic* (33%) are also accessed, along with a range of other providers including for example, *Pathways Awarua*.

When asked about accessing Ministry of Education support funding, a small number of providers indicated that they had been able to do so, and this included access to Interim Response, Behavioural Support and ORS. However, all participants (100%) described this process as “challenging” or “very difficult”, indicating that it was not easy for some of the reasons quoted here:

“No, as it has to go via Enrolling school, then Consortium, then Provider, takes weeks”

“Challenging due to working with multiple enrolling schools (who have to make the IRF application) and then, ensuring funds are forwarded to AE Managing school”.

“No, it is very difficult. The funding can not be directly accessed by AE providers and must be applied for by the managing school”.

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## SUMMARY

The overall aim of the survey was to understand the PLD experiences and needs of AE educators. Consequently, the survey sought information about the participants’ preferred methods of learning, barriers to accessing PLD, and PLD topics of relevance. Information was also gathered about AE educators experiences of engagement with Pedagogical Leaders. Specific questions for Managers related to accessing MOE specialised services and/or funding for Learning Support provision.

70% of participants who completed the survey had been working in the sector for longer than 4 years. The majority of those whom completed the survey identified as teaching/tutor educators, or managers/coordinators. Interestingly 9% of educators working in AE do not hold any qualification beyond school. 49% did not have any education related qualifications, but did have either youth work, or social services related qualifications.

Barriers to PLD mainly related to cost, relief cover and time. These factors are often interrelated. Relief cover is unique to AE as the practice is relationship based. It is not feasible to have a reliever cover without a pre-existing relationship with young people. 40% of participants also indicated a ‘lack of PLD opportunities’ as being a barrier.

While a wide range of PLD topics have been accessed, participants indicated that they would most like to learn about: Māori youth development and hauora/wellbeing, trauma informed practice, transitioning young people, and culturally responsive practice. Behaviour management and understanding neuro diverse learners were also PLD topics most requested by participants.

The way participants preferred to learn was varied but learning in community, e.g. in groups or at conferences was important. When asked what PLD experiences participants would like the majority indicated they would like to work toward a qualification (micro-credentialed). Experiencing PLD in a community of practice was also requested.

Managers (60% of participants) were asked specific questions related to MOE Learning Support. 20% indicated they had received some support from Learning Support Coordinators. Regarding Interim Response, Behavioural Support and ORS support only a small number indicated they had been able to do so, and all participants described the process as difficult and challenging.

These findings presented some insight into current PLD experiences and also possible areas of future growth and need. The findings also were helpful in determining the nature of the interviews to explore key themes in greater depth.

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## The interviews

In depth interviews were selected as a way to gain deep insight into the experiences of fourteen AE educators. A range of participants were selected to ensure different perspectives. Consequently, interview topics, rather than structured questions were selected to guide the conversation. Very experienced participants provided helpful insights into policy, whereas participants relatively new to the sector were able to share of their experiences as educators and what this meant for PLD. The most experienced participant had been working in the sector in a range of roles for 20 years, and the least experience, just 6 months. Participants' roles varied including as Manager, Tutor, Teacher, and Pedagogical Leader. This variety of perspectives was very helpful in gaining insight from different viewpoints. Additionally, participants were selected from a range of places in Aotearoa including the South and North Islands, and both urban and rural locations. Interviews took place via zoom and were audio recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis through constant comparison was used as a data analysis approach to generate themes.

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## RESULTS

The following themes emerged through the data analysis process and are presented below with participant quotes:

- AE context (including the experiences of AE educators, as well as young people and their experiences of learning)
- PLD: what works, barriers and needs
- External context including policy and culture of schooling

### ***AE Context: Experiences of educators***

**Retention and burnout.** Understanding the experiences of educators and young people in AE is vital for all interested in strengthening the AE workforce. When participants were asked about their experiences of PLD and what is needed the interview conversation often turned to employment conditions and consequent implications for PLD. AE educators were described as caring and adaptable problem solvers, who wore multiple hats and were often without the skills and knowledge needed to deliver curriculum effectively. The following quotes capture these ideas:

*I think when you've been in the Alt Ed space for a long time you become really great at problem solving you know because you're constantly having to think on your feet and you're constantly trying to you know every day is a new kind of challenge you know, never a dull day in AE.*

Participants indicated that this high level of challenge day after day often took its toll on educators:

***But you know our tutors that we've had over the years have cared about kids, they've had skills working with kids, they all love you know the idea but it's the delivering the curriculum in an effective way on a daily basis it's what kills them. Because it makes them feel that they're not doing their job properly. The kids say I haven't learned anything you know I haven't got any qualifications and they haven't.***

This manager also spoke about being under pressure to organise PLD for his educators as he was needing to cover for a staff member who “*had a breakdown*”:

*a lot of people in Alt Ed are wearing different hats. So, you know myself I'm a programme manager but also the main tutor for our NCEA students. Balancing that time of when I can be released to focus on management and management you know comes, well the whole PLD for my staff comes under that management role. And so we've been, so **one of my staff had a breakdown last year so we're a staff short for the majority of last year** and most of the whole covid thing which meant my release time from my classroom based position was really minimal, but long term again it means that I haven't had that long term input into my staff in the way that I would have liked to.*

This last quote reveals the pressure the manager is under to deliver what he knows his staff need. This pressure on staff, combined with low incomes often led to high staff turnover, and retention of staff was a recurring theme as the following quotes indicate:

*...the pay generally has been so poor...**three years ago we had 25 to 30 staff, we only have one staff member who's the same.** So, in three years everyone's gone.*

*there's significant staff turnover. I mean I've got a Pedagogical Leader who I've had the same Pedagogical Leader for five or six years, but she must have trained up 80 staff in that time you know, staff who have come and gone.*

*...lost our trained teacher who was doing really well after a year because she just couldn't sustain [the low income]*

*The trained teacher left because it wasn't paid enough.*

*We've had a provider pull out who they said to us we can't do this any longer it's too hard. Not enough money in it.*

*It's just not financially viable. So we have to apply for grants all over the place, you know, just to keep that other 40-50% coming in. You know the staff are all underpaid, like minimum wage...you've got to have a heart for the job or you don't just last. To be honest, we couldn't afford to bring on a qualified teacher.*

Only one of the participants indicated that staff turnover in their programme was low. She attributed this to a range of factors:

*give them the break in the holidays so that they get that downtime. I do supervision with the staff as well. It's like a whanau atmosphere. And I would never ask my staff to do something I wouldn't do myself. But again, we do pick people that have the passion. We value them and value their family as well.*

Another manager speaking about staff retention suggested compassion fatigue and values misalignment are often leading causes for burn out:

*Where the organisation says its' values are this but is actually doing something else and that feels really uncomfortable for [staff]. Or it's the constant exhaustion of not knowing how to respond to people's needs.*

**Professional identity.** AE educators' identity recurred as a theme and from varying perspectives. Teachers, tutors, youth workers, and support workers are employed and the kaleidoscope of varied professional identities contribute significantly to the unique context of AE, and have implications for PLD and the strengthening of the workforce. Almost all participants discussed their experiences of working in AE as aligned to how they are perceived and how they perceive themselves. Some teachers identify more as tutors and use this term to describe themselves. As this one participant explained this can be confusing:

*because I have that conflict, am I a teacher, am I a tutor? I am a really good teacher but I know my day to day does not look like a normal teacher. For me it depends on context. Professionally if I'm around teachers and I call myself a tutor I don't feel like we're on the same level.*



Unlike the teacher/tutor above, another participant defined a tutor as one not trained in education, and saw this as a challenging complication. She expressed concern at the preparedness of AE educators, especially those from non-education backgrounds:

***There's a huge difference between teachers and tutors...those who come to [AE] through social work or youth work or some other avenue that haven't had the teacher training...and you just see a huge difference in how to structure curriculum to meet the needs of individual students and how they structure groups and all sorts of things that you learn as a teacher.***

The naming of roles and links to professional identity is further confused here, where she goes on to add “not all teachers make good AE tutors because they don't have the personal ability to build those relationships, that's a huge difference that I notice”.

All participants recognise that AE is relational first and foremost. And most believe that wearing the “tutor hat” better facilitates this relational practice:

***The way that teachers in alternative education teach is the new way that teaching needs to happen. It's more relational, more that one on one you know where a student is from where they are and where they want to go rather than curriculum putting it on the child. I guess there's that area of conflict, yeah and I think yeah under the tutor hat you feel like you've got freedom to allow that time, allow that.***

Perspectives on professional identities and role were varied and arguably confusing. Most participants differed in their views, but all participants were clearly exploring what professional identity means for their own practice, not least the education experiences they were creating.

### **AE Context: Young people and their experiences of learning**

Many of the participants reflected on the nature of young people in AE and their experiences of learning as significant to the shaping of PLD for AE educators. Young people in AE often have complex living needs that can make learning difficult.

*At the end of the day if the kid's wondering 'where the heck am I going to sleep tonight' or you know 'where is my next meal coming from', to hear that two plus two equals four that's irrelevant. That means nothing, it's about getting those basic needs met, feeling safe, you know having shelter, having you know steady meals, having that person who they trust and you know connections, all of that. If those aren't being met then schooling doesn't matter.*

*I guess the needs are changing in that I think the poverty is getting worse you know and the emergency housing wasn't an issue that we had twenty years ago but now it is. We have kids living in cars and kids living on the marae you know because*

*there's just, they're homeless. That's a real issue now. And synthetic drugs are the new thing that we're seeing more and more of.*

Covid lockdown further highlighted the complexity of young peoples' lives. Reflecting on that time, one participant recalls:

*It was pretty tough...we had to actually distribute our own devices and of course if they go missing, we don't have funds to replace. So, it was a real sort of space that we're going to lend you this device please look after it and return it and they all did we didn't lose any...but yeah probably about half of the kids did the work that went up for them to do. It was more I guess more of our worry was round those kids, we've got quite a few kids in emergency housing, in motels, in boarding houses, you know and it was just yeah just hard. For them lockdown wasn't watching Netflix and baking with parents it was quite a different experience.*

Given the complexities of AE young peoples' lives, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the PLD needs requested by participants focused on development issues, before learning. This was consistent with findings from the survey and is explored further in the following themed section.

### **PLD: What works, barriers and needs**

An increased request for meaningful PLD within the sector has grown overtime and as one participant noted:

*We're not a casual sector anymore, people are wanting to be trained and are wanting help and support in different areas so PLD's definitely becoming a real need in our sector now not just a 'oh that would be nice to have'. **I think it's not just a nice conversation anymore, there's a hunger in the sector now for something to happen. Things need to change.***

The following sub-themes overlap and are further unpacked in the discussion section with recommendations for ways in which the workforce may be strengthened.

**PLD that works.** Participants shared the 'best of' in terms of PD that they had experienced, and what really stood out as making a difference to their practice and outcomes for young people. All participants valued PLD and as one participant succinctly noted "it was us that needed to change" rather than the young people. Not surprisingly, communities of practice (such as the national conference, regional gatherings, and within programme PLD), Pedagogical Leadership support, specific topic related workshops plus working toward relevant qualifications were all discussed. Specifically, regarding the national conference and regional gatherings participants made the following insightful comments:

*conferences have been a really key part in I guess the culture of our team here but also like I said **being in an environment where everyone's speaking the same***

**language.** *You know the alternative education hui, you're sitting in a conference where everyone understands what you're working with.*

Regarding regional gatherings, one manager recalls:

*[AE staff] do like it when they **get together, share stories and support each other.** They really like that because you know it can be fairly isolating. So that happens at national level but we ran a regional one last year and they just, they loved it.*

The chance to get together with people who understand the unique mahi, learn together and support each other is highly valued. Within-programme PLD where teams learn together as a community of practice was discussed by a number of participants. One participant recalled how after a management and provider change, there was a need to undertake significant PLD with staff related to youth development practice. For an intensive period of time he delivered:

*a crash course on youth development. It was bloody hard work to be honest. I was on the ground with the team from 9 til 3 and every day from 3 til 5 we debriefed. It was crazy and it wasn't healthy...but it honestly paid off.*

The after school time was not favoured by participants, and one participant indicated they were instead trialling a before school fortnightly PLD series.

Some participants discussed the value of Pedagogical Leader support, and in particular mentoring and modelling good practice. Additionally, participants noted the value in having someone “who understands AE”. One of the Pedagogical Leaders interviewed indicated that they chose to prioritise “building relationships and focusing on values” in the programme with AE educators, as well as “supporting them to make curriculum links [while] “bringing their creativity out”. It is worth noting here that while some participants valued the work of Pedagogical Leaders, a number expressed concerns and these are noted in the barriers section.

Upskilling by qualification was noted as worthy of investment. Specifically, people gave examples of blended learning (a combination of block courses, as well as online learning) as beneficial. One participant shared an example of this which related to the AUT social education course:

*I thought the model used where sporadically they would have a whole day or two whole days when they were released to focus on [learning] intensively and then use their experiences in class to [apply] it, is probably the best model for them. In terms of the benefits the staff raved about it. And a couple of the tutors that were involved I definitely could see in their practice there was more confidence.*

**PLD barriers.** Almost all participants indicated the biggest barrier to accessing PLD was financial. Other factors that may PLD difficult included time, teacher release and the energy of educators given the context of their work:

*It's really hard in an AE setting to bring in a reliever because they don't know the person, you know you can't operate with relievers in an AE setting. You're just creating mayhem so actually the time needed you know, time and free time and AE tutors, most of the tutors that I'm aware of don't get time out during the day.*

*Yeah the energy levels by 3 o'clock they're shot because they've not only picked up kids in the morning and then they've delivered them home at the end of the day, they've been with them all day.*

*...haven't got the resourcing and the time and actually it's time and energy.*

***Not a lot of people can afford to study...you've got to be earning [a reasonable income].***

*The biggest barrier for us has been the finances.*

Another area of concern related to Pedagogical Leader support, or lack thereof. Many of the participants expressed frustration with the role and function of the Pedagogical Leader, and the lack of support being provided to AE educators:

*our Pedagogical Leader's not terribly proactive...*

*So our Pedagogical Leader is awesome...but it's only part of her role in her mainstream school. **So we're more sort of squeezed in when she can make it.***

*the two PLs that we had working you know with different, with our groups were very very different. So **one PL would come in and actually work with the students** and teach the students once a week, didn't do that much with the actual tutors. Whereas the other PL he had no interaction with the students and occasionally does stuff like with the tutors but it's not consistent enough and to be honest whenever we asked for things, "oh hey can we do some PD around this", or whatever it's just doesn't seem to happen. **He kind of puts together what he thinks we need which is often irrelevant.***

***The other PL wasn't doing any tutor development** it was all around her working with the kids. So there's frustration on both sides. But that's right across New Zealand you know whenever we meet and stuff **the PL models are really, really varied.***

As the above quotes indicate there appears to be a lack of clarity and often times, a lack of meaningful implementation of support from Pedagogical Leaders in some regions.

Regarding qualifications almost all participants indicated they would like to see a relevant qualification available for AE educators in Aotearoa:

*I think access to qualifications, to funding so that may make accessing qualifications easier.*

*I think there'd be a lot of interest [in a qualification], having a specific targeted qualification.*

*for people that are already in the sector yeah **micro credentials like in an apprenticeship type model would work.***

*Yep and in the sector we haven't got the resources to say, 'yes you take study leave for six months and we'll cover you'.*

*I would love if there was a qualification that was specific to Alt Ed, I just think that would be just awesome.*

It is worth noting here that even managers interviewed were sometimes not aware of qualifications that are available that could offer something of value for their staff. Additionally, while all participants had a desire to learn, barriers appeared to be significant, and the PLD needs substantial as the following section indicates.

**PLD needs.** In addition to establishing a relevant qualification, participants indicated a vast range of PLD needs, with suggestions for strengthening the workforce. One participant was very clear in what is needed,

*I think we should be paying our tutors more and providing them with the right training, actually **they're there to teach our most vulnerable kids and yet they have the least trained-usually the least trained-people in front of them delivering their education. It's just a huge anomaly.***

Regarding content focussed PLD, participants indicated the need for training in a range of areas including becoming assessors (for NZQA standards), understanding neuro diversity and practice, understanding trauma informed teaching, the basics of pedagogy and curriculum, youth development, leadership, cultural capability and digital tech.

How AE educators want to learn was also a strong focus in the participant interviews. In addition to ideas shared in previous sections participants gave the following examples of what was needed:

*a training package, actual learning package for AE people but it needs to be quite a modular, recognition of prior learning and then some core modules that you know are fundamental to AE.*

*I love online but there's something different when you're face to face....even if it's not all the time but having some workshops that are face to face*

*Maybe face to face in the holidays or something like that. I do value the face to face stuff I think that's still important but again because people can't, well not a lot of people can afford to study you know like you've got to be earning you know and we need them in the classroom so I guess it would be around yeah the bulk of it would probably have to be online with some yeah face to face stuff in the holidays.*

*there really needs to be that ongoing focus and revisiting [learning] otherwise it just becomes something else that falls by the wayside.*

One participant suggested that more intentional PLD support come directly from managing schools:

*...being open to their teachers being able to provide upskilling to our staff, not just the managing school but also to like the RTLB clusters, like if we've got young people that have come from having RTLB funding, like even if they don't directly come in and support the young person, like being able to come in and deliver training with our tutors in different areas to upskill them.*

All participants suggested different ways in which communities of practice could be established further, such as networking, resource sharing and strengthening regional connections:

*the region is very weak, been really disconnected, there's nothing happening collaboratively. I'd love us as a region to get together...around PLD that is available across our region, just some real, yes like realistic workshops.*

*We could benchmark, where you put two organisations together to compare their systems, their culture, their practices...take the learning that they can back and then come up with an implementation plan for improvement.*

***why can't we have a resource bank [for sharing ideas]***

One participant raised some of the concerns and challenges with implementation:

*how do we resource it so we've got time for it, how do we set that up...that sort of cross pollination idea where we're going to flourish if we're mixing and we're having some really honest conversations, there's no egos...**we've all got something to learn from each other**....and how do we create safety and safety comes from relationships and trust. There's a lot of groundwork that needs to happen for those sorts of systems to be really effective.*

Another key area for PLD need that relates directly to strengthening the workforce is the care for AE educators as a matter of policy and embedded practice. Suggestions included a supervision or coaching programme as well as:

*like external supervisors or mentors or a counsellor...do we have systems and do we have resourcing to be able to provide professional supervision or some sort of staff support programme?*

This need for educators' care is especially pertinent given the prevalence of high staff turnover and burnout in the sector. In the following section this idea is explored further along with a range of policy and cultural factors that offer suggestions for change, as well as exposing current challenges and sector wide inequities.

### **External context: MOE policy and culture of education and schooling**

While AE educators' experiences of PLD was the focus of this research, participants often shared their perspectives of the ways in which MOE policy and the culture of education and schooling shaped experiences of AE educators. Their concerns related to sector recognition, system integration (becoming more fully integrated in to the education system), the culture of education and schooling, as well as structural issues including pay parity, Learning Support integration and subcontracting issues.

There is no doubt that education has failed the most vulnerable young people in Aotearoa, including those in the AE sector and that urgent changes are required. As this participant explained:

*I was saying that the unique perspective that you get from our spaces **we see every way that the system fails**. You get to see the entire education community and if you're doing your job well, you see the systemic failing from, you know intervention that should have happened at ECE through to where Oranga Tamariki, Learning Support, all of these people have been in and been out but it still hasn't worked and then you get what you get when this young person arrives on your doorstep in AE at 14.*

Participants shared their views of young peoples' experiences at school. They perceived that the mainstream school culture provided a dis-service to many:

*that young people who show behaviours of disrespect aren't necessarily bad kids. They just probably felt disrespected themselves.*

*they're expecting to be treated with mutual respect, as a person. You know as a young person not a child. **And that's where I see the breakdown of relationships often is they're not treated with mutual respect** because they're different, you know they've experienced life in a different way too many young people and so they often don't have the emotional regulation or tools to be able to handle that and shit happens then they end up at AE.*

He went on to explain that advocacy and working toward increased recognition is vital:

***We have to keep pushing our young people over ground as it were rather than you know letting policy or bad practise keep them hidden.***

A number of other participants indicated how important education sector recognition is for the strengthening of AE and the AE workforce:

***I just want the Ministry of Education to get their head around AE...the lack of leadership you know because AE is in the too hard basket because it was kind of an ad hoc add on.***

***the first thing would be to get AE recognised in the sector because we're just the poor, you now, we're just the cast offs.***

***we're always overlooked and nobody wants to know you know, because we're tucked away. Once [the students] are off their school grounds nobody cares anymore.***

One of the participants described AE educators as “a hidden workforce”. Nobody knows how many educators work in AE, and there are a range of personnel including part time volunteers, Pedagogical Leaders, managers, coordinators, support educators, etc. There are also youth guarantee tutors funded to take AE students. This diversity and adaptability is a strength, but also a limitation as the AE sector continues to exist in isolation and without sufficient support. An example of this is the isolation and frustration that some teachers have felt when trying to become fully registered, or maintain registration. As one participant recalls “the teachers’ council that’s been an ongoing issue for me is getting fully registered while in AE”.

Experienced participants, especially, indicated a shift in perception about engagement with the Ministry of Education. They shared their ideas about further integration, and better recognition in the following ways:

***we need to be brought into the education system you know and that will be scary for a lot of us and I understand that. But that’s the only way that we can really get the resourcing. You know we can’t survive [in the current funding model].***

***there is a growing acknowledgement that AE tutors are skilful and resourceful but we have to acknowledge we’re part of the sector. We do need to be careful not to try and turn our tutors into teachers but at the same time we are in the job of education. We have to stay deeply embedded in the [local] community as well because that’s where the 'special' comes from—it’s uniqueness.***

***If you really want the AE sector to be recognised as part of education then we can’t be anti-education.***

This participant went on to reflect on the frustration and anger from AE educators because of the sustained alienation from MOE through a lack of required support. He reflected:



*that strongly oppositional stance just means in the end that we have this clash and our young people miss out you know. We need to find a way to actually embrace the best in both worlds. We need to work on developing that mutual respect and valuing one another. AE is not going to get valued by just being angry and I understand the anger.*

Frustrations were expressed about the challenges of the subcontracting system, Learning Support concerns, and also underpayment of AE educators by the Ministry of Education. Regarding subcontracting and the employment conditions of educators there are significant variations between providers. This applies to pay inequities, significant variation in PLD provision, and the fair and reasonable management of educators. As one participant explains:

*that means that whoever holds the contract can pay their staff whatever their staff is worth you know. I'd love to see a standardised rate I think it's well overdue,*

*But I think that's always been one of the most frustrating things for me is that you know from a coordinator's perspective you've got no control over the pay or the conditions of the AE staff in the sector.*

*I've seen some staff get paid well, relatively well—nowhere near as well as a teacher in the sector. And I've seen some **appalling paying conditions** as well and that's within the same contract within the same area, and there's no control over that.*

In addition to the pay and PLD provision inequities across providers, the participant has also observed an abusive provider manager whom appeared to have no or little accountability.

*I've seen a tutor get sacked for next to nothing. It can be really cowboy [sector] you know. One manager once told me, when I was talking to her about the way she spoke to her staff. She was **constantly yelling and swearing and abusing** them and she said, "oh that's the only the way they understand".*

He concluded that the **Ministry of Education subcontracting model essentially, "absolves itself of any real [responsibility]...they're one step removed...there's no protection for AE educators.** They're completely and utterly at risk of whims of whoever happens to be their manager". This inconsistency appears to be across almost all aspects of AE. For example, Pedagogical Leadership provision, and engagement with Learning Support services.

Most participants expressed concern at the lack of support through Learning Support channels, "In terms of Learning Support with the ministry and even RTLB letting kids maintain that support when they come into AE has been really difficult". With the exception of one or two regions, AE providers appear to be disconnected from the Learning Support provisions.

Part of the frustration seems to come from an inherited culture of practice by those in the Learning Support field, rather than policy driven. One region is an exception to this and the participant explained how this works there:

***Policy wise Learning Support are supposed to work with young people but in many areas this doesn't happen. In [our region it's different]. We have fortnightly meetings with the local area office to talk about young people that appear on both our books and basically you know managing cases together, sharing information, we are able to refer to Learning Support. All these of these things that we weren't able to do before [have changed now].***

Another participant recently challenged the regional manager about the lack of support. She recalls:

***...and then there's AE sitting outside. I said, 'we're not outside of the box, we're part of Learning Support, what are you doing, where is the leadership within Learning Support for AE'? Well deathly silence.***

The pressures are compounded by a gross lack of funding impacting on wages and also on facilities. The inequities for example between Activity Centres and AE programmes are extraordinary. As one participant explained:

***In activity centres there are paid teachers with management units attached, they get an ops grant, they're really well funded. Because yes out of the money you get for AE you have to pay for the building and the ops and staff. Activity centre don't pay, the activity centre their managing school, they're on the staff so that the ministry of education pays for the teaching educators and then you get an ops grant based on the decile 1A rating and you get five or ten year property stuff, they got \$50,000 this year because through the extra funding that's going into schools. So they're very well-funded and resourced.***

Conversely, a participant relatively new to AE observed:

***I see a lot of AE buildings are just shocking and like a parent turns up and they're like, 'whoa I don't want to see'. Like on the face value this looks like crap and that doesn't reflect the gold that's happening on the inside that is constantly...you know you're trying to rub two pennies together to make something happen.***

When reflecting on next steps for the sector and what could be, a number of participants suggested that AE be rethought as, "a legitimate option, where it's not something where you get kicked out of school. It's valued as an alternative it's not just this dumping ground you know". While participants tended to agree that a greater integration with the education system would strengthen the sector, there was also an acknowledge of the complexity of working across siloed systems:

***the sector's strength is that it lies between youth work, social work and education. And it lies in the middle so that's our strength but then it's also our weakness because we don't fit.***

*We're not solely education. Like we I don't know sort of...social development stuff, youth justice stuff, there's you know the health stuff and then there's the education. Yes there needs to be collaboration of all these different sectors that our kids fit into, you know collaborate and yeah work together. Recognise that each part plays a role.*

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## SUMMARY

When reflecting on the interview findings there is no doubt that significant broader structural factors impact on AE educators' experiences of PLD. These include a lack of sector recognition and education mainstream system integration; and relatedly, the exclusionary culture of education and schooling, a lack of pay parity, and subcontracting issues. One of the main concerns expressed by participants related to a lack of consistency across the sector. Examples included inconsistencies with Pedagogical Leadership support, Learning Support access, and employment conditions (including pay and PLD provision).

While all participants were very positive about the PLD opportunities they have been given, they also explained how barriers prevented access to PLD, including for example funding, time, and educators release to attend PLD. All participants were keen to see learning communities of practice grow across the sector, including increased opportunities to share ideas, network, and learn together. Participants are interested in the possibility of a specialised training that is qualification based, modular, directly related to AE, and includes recognised prior learning (RPL).

In the following section these findings and the survey findings are combined and discussed in light of existing research.

## DISCUSSION

The survey completed for this research study provides a snapshot of the AE workforce experiences of PLD. While it is not known how many AE educators are employed within Aotearoa/New Zealand, it is estimated here that approximately 20% of those working in AE completed this survey. The majority of survey respondents (70%) have been working in the sector for more than 4 years. Based on the results of the survey it is estimated that only half of those working in the sector have any form of formal training in the field of education. Regarding AE educators training in education, one of the interview participants concluded:

*They are there to teach our most vulnerable kids and yet they have the least trained-usually the least trained-people in front of them delivering their education. It's just a huge anomaly.*

It is clear from other research studies that high quality educators are the greatest asset that the sector has and “the success of [AE] settings...rests on the practices of the educators” (Plows & te Riele, 2016)<sup>5</sup>. Pertaining to the development of high-quality educators, this discussion section explores the following themes that have emerged from the survey and interviews: professional identity, what AE educators want to learn, how AE educators want to learn, structural issues and systemic barriers. This discussion section will include considerations for stakeholders, taking into account findings from part one of this broader study<sup>6</sup>.

### **Professional identity**

AE educator's identity recurred as a theme throughout the survey and interview findings. Teachers, tutors, youth workers, and support workers offer varied professional identities, and while this contributes significantly to the unique context of AE, it also presents policy and practice challenges. In part one of this broader researcher study, it was noted that the names we give to educators working in AE, and indeed the way we frame and understand the very nature of AE are vital considerations for effectiveness.<sup>7</sup> At the heart of these discussions is the need to explore further what it means to be a sector that primarily exists at the intersections of two disciplines: youth work and education. In a cross-disciplined sector for example, in what ways can we strengthen the practice of all educators in AE? To what extent might the sector be enhanced by registered teachers trained in youth development and youth work practice; and to what extent do we need youth workers trained with an understanding of education practices? And which Code of Ethics/Professional Responsibility applies to whom

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<sup>5</sup> Plows, V. & te Riele, K. (2016). *Professional learning in flexible programmes: Supporting educators to foster socially inclusive schooling*. Melbourne: The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning.

<sup>6</sup> The first part of this study is retrievable here, <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/101317>

<sup>7</sup> In both this and the previous report AE is defined from a strengths-based, rather than deficit perspective. The elements are derived in part from Martin's (2020) study investigating characteristics of AE.

and in what context, and what is the relationship between the two? Furthermore, where are the points of intersection and departure? And for mainstream education, what lessons can be learned from a ‘mergence’ of the two fields of education and youth work/youth development? Alternatively, or perhaps similarly, Schoone (2020)<sup>8</sup> explores the value of social educators/social pedagogues for reframing the way we view tutors, and also explores what the field of social pedagogy has to offer to education more broadly.

In part one of this broader study, when examining related sectors, it was found that strengthening professional identity in ECE and youth work sectors was in part due a culture shift that occurred through national documents (including strategy) that provided a common language for the workforce as well as key stakeholders, and thus generated collective momentum for innovation and change. Findings from part one of this study have significance here pertaining to the value of a national strategy for workforce development. A comprehensive national strategy is likely to further strengthen professionalism in the sector, and participants<sup>9</sup> from part one of this study recommended that a strategy with a PLD focus ought to recognise the different needs of educators with different entry points for learning. While there are foundational PLD topics (e.g., curriculum knowledge) that all educators need, such a strategy needs to be dynamic enough to be responsive and productive with variation in topics and pedagogy.

### ***What AE educators want to learn, and how they want to learn***

Given the complexities of AE young peoples’ lives, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the PLD needs requested by participants focused on development issues, before learning. In fact, the most requested topics of study,<sup>10</sup> as indicated by survey respondents, were as follows:

Topic	Percentage
Māori youth development	64
Hauora/wellbeing	64
Trauma informed practice	62
Transitioning young people	57
Culturally responsive pedagogies	55
Behaviour management	53
Neuro diverse learners	51
Pacific youth development	51
Educators wellbeing	49
Curriculum assessment	

<sup>8</sup> Schoone, A. (2020). *Returning to the heart of teaching: Social pedagogy as phenomenological pedagogy*.

<sup>9</sup> Participants in part one study were from Early Childhood Education and Youth Work sectors.

<sup>10</sup> For the full list of possible topics see the Appendix.

As Martin (forthcoming)<sup>11</sup> explains “what experienced educators in AE recognise is that meeting developmental needs creates a foundation, or platform for re-engaging rangatahi in learning”. When developmental needs are met, learning becomes possible.

From both survey and interview data it was clear that AE educators are interested in: (1) learning within varied communities of practice (within programme, across regions and nationally); (2) learning through a relevant qualification, and (3) accessing supervision/coaching as a way to strengthen and support practice. Within programme learning included topic related workshops, as well as on the ground support from Pedagogical Leaders (through mentoring, coaching and the modelling of good practice). Participants also shared the value of regional gatherings and national conferences as a useful way to “get together, share stories and support each other.”

Communities of practice may be defined as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”<sup>12</sup> Survey respondents and interview participants all shared the value of engaging in varied communities of practice. An evidence-based understanding of the value of this practice may provide a way forward in strengthening the AE workforce. While within programme, regional and national gatherings for PLD were discussed, there may also be value in an interactive, dynamic online platform as a way to create a learning community and to foster a culture of learning for AE educators. Such a hub could provide a useful point of connection for educators as well as those in related education sector services<sup>13</sup> (such as youth justice schools and youth work/youth development contexts working with vulnerable young people). This platform could include an opportunity for resource sharing, stories, ideas, conundrums shared via podcasts, webinars, online interactive events, etc.

Regarding the possibility of a specialised qualification and/or tailored training package, almost all participants expressed a keen interest in this idea. For those who had recent experience working toward a qualification, they indicated a preference for modular, blended learning (a combination of block courses, plus online learning). Many also thought there would be value in micro credential learning that enabled an “*apprenticeship type model*” as well as ensuring that there was Recognised Prior Learning for existing achievements and capability. However,

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<sup>11</sup> Martin, L. (forthcoming). *Youth learning and development*. In J. Bruce, (Ed.), *Alternative Education and Youth Development in Aotearoa/New Zealand. A Resource for Educators*.

<sup>12</sup> Wenger-Trayner E & B. (2015). *Introduction to communities of practice: A brief overview of the concept and its uses*. Retrieved from <https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>

<sup>13</sup> Referred to as Flexible Learning Programs in Australia. These are education programs “characterised by a shared vision of offering inclusive educational pathways for young people who, for varied reasons, are disengaged from or have sought alternatives to traditional schooling models”. As cited in Plows, V. & te Riele, K. (2016). *Professional learning in flexible learning programs*. Victoria Institute, Australia.

as is discussed in the following section there are a significant number of barriers to access including time, cost and meaningful training that would need significant attention.

A smaller number of participants indicated that supervision or coaching as a practice of educators care may contribute to wellbeing, safety and retention. One programme with a very high retention rate routinely ensured that educators engaged in supervision. Given high educators turnover and burnout is a very significant challenge for the AE sector, this is a possible support structure that could be explored further.

Overall, AE educators needs pertaining to how they want to learn appears to be relatively consistent with findings from the ECE and youth work sectors. In part one of this study, it was found that these sectors valued PLD that was relational, *kanohi kit e kanohi*, and diverse enough to cater to all.

### ***Structural issues and systemic barriers***

The final theme that emerged from this research related to barriers to accessing PLD, as well as structural issues and systemic barriers that impacted on strengthening the workforce. Specifically, there are concerns related to consistency and at times safe practice across a range of related areas including Learning Support access, Pedagogical Leadership, the exclusionary nature of education, and unsafe employment conditions.

Alienation of AE from the mainstream sector has in many ways mirrored the alienation of young people whom it serves. Participants of this study were both cognisant of the damaging impact of sector alienation and of the need to work towards greater system integration that may contribute to increased quality and ethical practice across the sector. One example of the negative impact of alienation provided by participants included a critique of the subcontracting model which has been known to inadvertently contribute to poor employment conditions. He expressed concern that a subcontracting model essentially “*absolves MOE of any responsibility*”, and cited examples of significant pay inequities—“*appalling pay conditions*”—as well as a lack of accountability for the employment and management of AE staff:

***I’ve seen a tutor get sacked for next to nothing. It can be really cowboy [sector] you know. One manager once told me, when I was talking to her about the way she spoke to her staff. She was **constantly yelling and swearing and abusing** them and she said, “oh that’s the only the way they understand”.***

Given this employment context, participants also recognised the significant challenge of both ensuring AE educators are consistently able to access quality PLD, and also the concern expressed, that when AE educators do become trained, many leave for better jobs with more satisfactory employment conditions.

Inconsistencies of support from Pedagogical Leaders and access to Learning Support services and networks also emerged as concerns for the sector. While many survey respondents and interview participants valued the support and PLD provided by Pedagogical Leaders, others expressed concern at a lack of engagement and relevance. Overall, there appears to be a lack of accountability, at least in some regions, as well as inconsistencies of provision. As part of a wider approach to further strengthening the workforce, attention to this area in particular could add significant value.

Learning Support networks and service provision was largely indicated as an area of concern and at times frustration. For example, 80% of survey respondents indicated they had not received support from Learning Support Coordinators, and regarding additional support from MOE specialist services, 100% indicated the process was very difficult. It appears that this alienation from Learning Support services and networks is largely historical and culture, and with the exception of one or two regions, participants indicated this as an area of frustration and one they would like to see change.

Other barriers to strengthening the workforce related to AE educators' access to quality PLD opportunities. Survey respondents indicated that cost, time and relief cover were the main barriers, with a "lack of PLD opportunities" also indicated. A national wide strategy with guidelines for PLD access and provision may contribute positively to creating a shift in this area. As part one of this study showed, developing a sector wide culture of placing high value on PLD has been seen to be advantageous to ECE and Youth Work sectors. The strong cultures of learning and engagement in PLD was attributed to supportive employers as well as regulatory requirements.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the aim of this study was to explore the PLD experiences of AE educators, giving consideration to the strengthening of the workforce. Through analysis of survey and interview data, a number of themes emerged that can provide some direction to ongoing strategic conversations with the AE sector and key stakeholders. An impetus for this research came from a perspective, also expressed by a participant in this study:

***we need to be brought into the education system you know and that will be scary for a lot of us and I understand that. But that's the only way that we can really get the resourcing. You know we can't survive [in the current funding model].***

Whether this expressed view is the right pathway or not is yet to be seen. After 25 years of struggle, and alienation from mainstream education, the AE sector continues to deliver services to many of the most vulnerable young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The sector continues to be sustained by an ethics of care from AE educators and the philanthropic sector. This state philanthropic partnership is highly problematic, as it is estimated that MOE only



funds around 50% of actual operating costs.<sup>14</sup> While structural inequities and systemic barriers hinder progress, a commitment within the sector to strengthen the workforce is evident. As such the findings of this study, accompanied by part one, *Lessons from Related Sectors*, provide insight into the experiences of AE educators, as well as possible considerations for a way forward. One such way forward could be to be cognisant of the ways in which related sectors have worked toward increased professionalism in the face of limited funding and resourcing:

*[This] growth in professionalism stems from collective leadership, and the development and adoption of key guiding documents within sectors. The documents provide a common direction and enable a common language which in turn generates a sense of connection and belonging, thus contributing to a growth in professional identity. Furthermore, it was found that a sector wide strategy provides opportunities for growth as the document gives clarity of vision and focus, and increases collective ownership<sup>15</sup>.*

Additionally, it was found that a national strategy increased effectiveness when key stakeholder buy-in was assured (including service leaders, educators and government).

The results of this study provide possible signposts for future investigation and the reshaping of aspects of the sector, including stricter regulatory requirements and monitoring of employment conditions, greater access to Learning Support networks and service provision, and effective Pedagogical Leadership support. Furthermore, a sector specific qualification and the removal of barriers to access and provision of meaningful PLD are very much worthy of consideration.

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<sup>14</sup> AE managers interview in this study indicated this figure. It was also found in an earlier research study: Bruce J. (2015) *Alternative education provision in Christchurch: Alternative possibilities for policy and practice*. Commissioned by Wayne Francis Charitable Trust. 40pp.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce, J. (2020). *Alternative Education workforce development in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Lessons from related sectors*. Report commissioned by the Wayne Francis Charitable Trust and Vodafone Aotearoa Foundation. Retrieved from <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/10131>.

## APPENDIX

Full list of suggested PLD topics.

### Topic

#### Development

Youth development in Aotearoa  
Māori youth development  
Pacific youth development  
Transitioning young people  
Hauora/wellbeing  
Neuro diverse learners

#### Curriculum and assessment

Curriculum and curriculum planning  
ILPs/ELPs  
Assessment for learning  
Digital/ICT skills

#### Pedagogies

Universal design for learning  
Culturally responsive pedagogies  
Trauma informed practice  
Relational pedagogies  
Behaviour management  
Counselling skills – pastoral care

#### Culture and leadership

Kaupapa Māori (including te reo and tikanga)  
Te Tiriti o Waitangi  
Leadership  
Team work and collaboration  
Problem solving  
Crisis management  
Logistical organisation and administration  
Educators wellbeing  
Ethics